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Countering the KGB

The case of the Soviet spies and the Canadian Mountie takes one more cloak off the danger of totalitarian espionage directed at the free world. It occurred right on the doorstep of the United States, which had itself just indicted two men accused of spying for communist Vietnam. The episodes underscored the importance of democratic governments keeping their intelligence and counterintelligence activities effective. This requires maintaining skill, vigor, morale, and the accountability to ensure that the agencies do not undermine democracy in the effort to protect it.

From all accounts the Canadians moved shrewdly to establish the existence of the Soviet plot for which 11 Soviet diplomats and officials have been expelled and two others prohibited from returning to Canada. When Soviet intelligence agents offered to pay a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to spy for them, he was authorized by the police to appear to play along. He was paid well for information of "no consequence," according to the Canadians, in a complex operation involving codes and passwords. The Mounties amassed the evidence and once more got their man — or, rather, a dozen men and a woman.

Yes, Virginia, there really is a KGB. And a welcome new attention is being paid to the machinations of this Soviet secret police force — providing some balance to the concentration in recent years on the shortcomings of America's FBI and CIA. One KGB watcher recently went so far as to say that the KGB had more complete files on American citizens than the ones for which U.S. intelligence agencies have been criticized. Democracies must be ever alert to techniques such as the use of "sleepers," spies who bide their time perhaps for years while getting into positions where they can be useful to their bosses. Remember the notorious KGB sleeper Kim Philby, who rose high in the British intelligence system over more than a decade. When the FBI says it needs more agents to keep track of the foreign agents in the U.S., the request must be considered seriously.

Recently Admiral Stansfield Turner, America's Director of Central Intelligence, said he welcomed the recent CIA splash in three news-weeklies, even though criticism of him and the intelligence agencies was included. He took it as evidence that his country was recognizing the importance of intelligence activities in a divided world — as it should.

The carrying out of these activities ought to become better and better as the Admiral's pruning of nonessential agency personnel takes effect — and its reported wounds to morale are healed. Meanwhile, both President Carter and the Congress are working to establish the CIA and other intelligence agencies on a sound con-

ternally at the CIA. A noteworthy addition is the call for special authorization to initiate surveillance of Americans abroad.

Now come the Senate intelligence committee's proposals for legislative charters to spell out the intelligence community's rights and responsibilities under law. Care will be needed in the final fashioning of this legislation to ensure that unforeseen future intelligence needs do not run into legislative inflexibility.

But it will be good to have intelligence abuses clearly specified as illegal and thus subject to the kind of legal penalties conspicuously absent so far after all the disclosures of the past. It has been welcome to learn that the CIA itself has been following up charges against personnel and imposing administrative penalties, including some firings. A lawyer is said to be standing by full time to advise agents on what is now permissible.

The proposed legislation ought to enhance accountability by requiring written documentation on controversial actions all the way to the president. This would be useful in any episode such as the recent case of spying for Vietnam, in which President Carter himself authorized television surveillance of a U.S. citizen. The legislation ought to spell out if and when and how such steps may be taken in the future.

Among promising parts of the legislation are some protection for American citizens caught in the enormous web of National Security Agency monitoring of electronic messages; banning of political assassinations; requirement of presidential authorization for covert activities; strict provision against disclosures of identity resulting in harm to secret agents.

Strong intelligence under law. That is what the free world needs. The American exercise toward that end is an extraordinary thing under the sun.